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SIPDIS

STATE DEPARTMENT FOR S/SRAP

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TAGS: [PREL](#) [ENRG](#) [ETRD](#) [EINV](#) [AF](#) [PK](#) [UZ](#) [TI](#)

SUBJECT: SRAP HOLBROOKE'S MEETING WITH PRESIDENT RAHMON

CLASSIFIED BY: Ken Gross, Ambassador, EXEC, DoS.

REASON: 1.4 (b), (d)

¶1. (C) Summary: In a one hour forty five minute meeting on February 20, President Rahmon reiterated his commitment to supporting U.S.-led efforts in Afghanistan and complained at length about Uzbek efforts to obstruct regional cooperation. Ambassador Holbrooke urged Rahmon to work with President Karzai to obtain support for regional infrastructure projects and to push Pakistan to conclude a transit trade agreement with Afghanistan. End Summary.

¶2. (C) Ambassador Holbrooke outlined USG strategy in Afghanistan, emphasizing U.S. support for President Karzai, and the commitment of civilian expertise in addition to increased troop numbers. Ambassador Holbrooke also explained the U.S. decision to cease eradication efforts against opium poppy production and to focus on destruction of drug traffickers rather than punishment of small scale producers. He acknowledged Tajik and Russian disagreement with this approach, saying the USG was convinced this was the best strategy to pursue and would increase counternarcotics cooperation with the Tajik government. Ambassador Holbrooke also acknowledged concerns about the upcoming "Peace Jirga" President Karzai was organizing, saying the United States shared these concerns; but since Karzai was determined to press ahead with this Jirga, it was important to make sure it was successful and did not contribute to ethnic tensions.

¶3. (C) Ambassador Holbrooke said USG assistance goals in Afghanistan focused on improving agricultural production and urged that Tajikistan do everything possible to increase trade with Afghanistan to spur economic development. He noted Foreign Minister Zarifi's proposals for a second U.S.-funded bridge to Afghanistan and for road, rail, and gas pipeline connections to Turkmenistan, but observed that truck traffic crossing the U.S.-funded bridge at Nizhny Pyanj still encountered long delays and the bridge needed to be fully utilized.

A HISTORY OF SUPPORT FOR AFGHANISTAN

¶4. (C) Rahmon recited the history of Tajik support for Afghanistan and for President Karzai, emphasizing Tajik

opposition to the Taliban. Rahmon said the United States should not repeat the mistake of the USSR of supporting the Afghan Tajiks over the Pashtun, but should ensure a government which represented the interests of all ethnic groups. Rahmon also made a plea for support for the CASA-1000 project, saying it was vital for the region, but that the ADB did not support it. He said that in the past week 35 Afghan police officers had begun training on counternarcotics in Tajikistan, and Tajikistan would train Afghan border guards, too.

INFRASTRUCTURE AND UZBEKISTAN

¶ 15. (C) Rahmon gave a short talk on the merits of Tajikistan's proposals for rail and pipeline connections to Turkmenistan, via Afghanistan, and the importance of the Dusti Jum and Roghun dams for CASA-1000. He presented his vision of a region economically open and integrated by rail, gas, electricity and road connections stretching from Iran through Central Asia. He then turned to the problem of Uzbekistan, giving a lengthy description of the hostile actions by the Uzbek government -- blocking transit trade to Tajikistan, mining the border, cutting electricity connections, and undermining the Roghun project. He said Uzbekistan wanted to "return to 1924" (note: the Tajik Autonomous Soviet Socialist Republic" was established as a part of the Uzbek SSR in 1924 and did not become a separate Soviet Republic until 1929.) Rahmon described President Karimov as an unreliable partner for the United States and a "Soviet politician."

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IRAN AND RUSSIA

¶ 16. (C) Rahmon expressed support for Pakistani President Zardari and for the strategy of reconciling Afghan Taliban. He said reconciliation with rebels had been the solution to the Tajik civil war. Rahmon then urged the United States to begin direct negotiations with Iran, asserting that the Iranian government was ready for face-to-face talks. He said that continued enmity between the United States and Iran played to Russian interests, which were to keep oil prices high, keep the central Asian states fearful and dependent on Russia for security, anti-Americanism strong among Muslims, and the United States dependent on Russia for help in resolving problems with Iran. Rahmon warned that if the United States attacked Iran, the "gates of Central Asia will close." He concluded by saying Tajikistan is the "strategic partner" of the United States and by praising President Obama's policy in Afghanistan."

CHINA AND RIVERS

¶ 17. (C) Ambassador Holbrooke asked what role China played in Tajikistan. Rahmon described China's role as "good and bad. For Tajikistan, which has serious problems, it's a good role. What other way do we have?" He did not explain what might be bad in this relationship. Rahmon took the opportunity to go to a large map of Tajikistan at the end of the table and point out the Chinese-funded power transmission line project between north and south Tajikistan and the road projects involving Chinese funding or contractors around the country. He also gave his idiosyncratic interpretation of transboundary water sharing obligations, asserting that the Vakhsh River, on which the Roghun Dam project lies, was not a transboundary river (note: it supplies about one third of the flow of the Amu Darya, which

flows into Uzbekistan). Rahmon also spoke at length about wasteful Uzbek water use, including reservoirs which he said were collectively larger than the Aral Sea.

SHOES AND STEPS

¶8. (C) Ambassador Holbrooke observed that Tajikistan had huge water resources in its Pamir glaciers. Rahmon agreed with this, and laughingly recalled a Russian proverb that he said described Tajikistan's situation: "We are the shoemaker with no shoes." Ambassador Holbrooke urged Rahmon to take two steps with regard to Afghanistan and Pakistan --first, use whatever influence he had with Zardari to push Pakistan to agree on a pending transit trade agreement with Afghanistan since this would open up large regional trade opportunities for Tajikistan, and second, agree with Presidents Karzai and Zardari on transborder infrastructure projects, since the United States would likely support such projects.

RAHMON'S POPULIST SCIENCE

¶9. (C) Comment: Rahmon clearly appreciated the opportunity to talk at length with Ambassador Holbrooke and was friendly and open in his assessments of Russian and Uzbek motivations. Rahmon gave his usual remarks promoting grandiose infrastructure projects and touting Tajikistan as open for business and a reliable political partner. Much of this differs from the reality we encounter, but the meeting elicited renewed commitment from Rahmon to support us in Afghanistan. End Comment.

¶10. (U) Ambassador Holbrooke cleared this cable.
GROSS